

Epiphany 53

LIBERTY IN EDUCATION.

by Charlotte M. Mason.

"Human nature contains such remarkable contrasts that the freedom of one part is bound up with the subjection of another.....The root error of many modern tendencies is the confusion of true personal freedom with mere individual licence....The disciples of the 'New education' begin with quite a correct idea -namely ,that the compulsory forcing of children into a mould leaves their personality undeveloped,& even injuriously affects it.They do not perceive that the laxity of their own methods is even more dangerous.....It is a revelation of the most deplorable superficiality to suppose that the elimination of obedience & restraint sets the individual free for higher development."

(Professor Foerster -of Munich) -X-

Quoted in

One of the results of the inquiring mind which has awakened in the world is, that we are not content to use terms without some notion as to their meaning. As for what is implied in Education, we have all tried to crack that hard nut, & some of us think we have found the kernel; anyway, it is not education, but liberty in education, a complex idea, that concerns us to-day.

It is the fashion to think that liberty means a relaxation or abandonment of the half-military discipline that is customary in schools. Quite little children should no doubt be pretty free to come & go, sit or stand, but every nurse knows that she must train children to 'sit nicely' for short periods, because the body is an unruly creature to be trained only by the discipline of habit, and,

"If he does such things at five what will he do at fifty?"

which is absurd but is true, all the same, for the ungainly person of fifty was probably an undisciplined child of five. Discipline, drill, are wholesome for boys as well as ~~convenient~~ convenient for schoolmasters.

We aim at imparting the ease, the final liberty, which comes of habits of self-control & so cannot forego discipline in

the schoolroom. Indeed, when we observe the fine deportment of the man where military service is universal we are inclined to think that the state should give physical training to all its youth, however free these are left to render service or refuse it.

But, ~~stone~~ stone walls to not a prison make nor iron bars a cage; Sir Walter Raleigh is not the only man who ranged the world the while his body was confined. Undue confinement is unendurable we know, but discipline is needful & it rests with the Schoolmasters to find the golden mean, & short 'periods' with intervals for gymnastic exercises, is the common solution. Boys & girls must stretch their legs now & then to limber their muscles & quicken their blood without taking much thought about liberty. For Liberty is of the spirit, -

"He is the freeman whom the truth makes free

And all are slaves besides." -

a fact which is ~~borne~~ brought home to us every day when we notice how 'limited' such an one is, when we fret under our own limitations. The keys of the Kingdom are indeed in the hands ~~of~~ of teachers whose part is to send forth scholars bearing the bold device,

'My mind to me a kingdom is'.

This may be possible we think for the brilliant, but what ~~and~~ about the average & the dull boys & girls?

For them, too, their mind, such as it is, should afford a kingdom, such as it is, for all kingdoms are not equal, but everyone has his own domain & therein finds his resources. That education fails in putting men into their proper inheritance, restaurant life, tango teas, an unlimited flow of 'gate money', irrational strikes, suicidal practices, & other ~~such~~ symptoms, testify.

Now Liberty is not a pagan divinity, a go-as-you-please Goddess; She who is known by a careless fling of the limbs, a bold & roving eye, a casual & easily turned course, is not Liberty, but License, & these are two that cannot dwell together.

Rule is a component part of Liberty; rule from without, leading up to rule from within.

Therefore, education must afford discipline & regulated emancipation, the freeing of the Scholars from imposed rule in proportion as he shews himself able to rule himself; which is not the same thing as, when he is old enough; quite a young